

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3603

September 21, 2012

The Honorable John S. Pistole
Administrator
Transportation Security Administration Headquarters
East Tower, Floor 11, TSA-5
601 South Twelfth Street
Arlington, VA 20598-6001

Dear Administrator Pistole:

I write to express concerns regarding the findings of a United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) report dated July 18, 2012 and titled "Weaknesses Exist in TSA's Process for Ensuring Foreign Flight Students Do Not Pose a Security Threat."

The GAO report outlines certain problems the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has had in making certain that applicants to the Alien Flight Student Program (AFSP) are not a threat to national security and that they are legally in the country. One problem is that foreign nationals are not successfully vetted against the Terrorist Screening Database prior to receiving flight training and receiving an FAA airman certificate. This oversight means that individuals wishing to harm the United States may obtain flight training and an airman certificate without an administrator ever knowing that individual poses a danger to the public.

A second problem is that TSA's screening does not include any steps to discover whether an applicant legally entered the United States. In one case, an illegal immigrant living in the Boston area was registered with TSA as a flight training provider under AFSP. However, he had never received a TSA security threat assessment or even been approved by TSA to obtain flight training. It was discovered that he was in the country illegally when he was stopped for a traffic violation. This instructor had 25 students in his flight program who were also in the country illegally. Allowing a person to train illegal immigrants to fly airplanes without checking to make sure the instructor is not a threat poses an unacceptable risk to national security.

To more fully understand how this situation came to pass and TSA's response, I would appreciate a full response to the following questions.

1. What steps have been taken to ensure foreign nationals are successfully vetted against the Terrorist Screening Database prior to obtaining flight training?

2. What progress has been made in investigating whether current members of the AFSP population were vetted against the Terrorist Screening Database prior to receiving flight training?
3. What steps have been taken to ensure that no foreign national is approved for flight training unless they are legally in the United States?
4. What steps have been taken to ensure that anyone authorized to provide flight training is vetted in the same manner as those applying to obtain flight training?
5. How were these oversights allowed to occur?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Should you have any additional questions, please contact Nathan Reese at 202-224-4721.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James M. Inhofe", written in a cursive style.

James M. Inhofe
United States Senator